

Message Text

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FOLLOWING REPEAT MUSCAT 1061 ACTION SECSTATE, INFO AMEMB LONDON DTD
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TAGS: PGOV MORG MPOL MU UK

SUBJECT: SAF COMMANDER UNEASY ABOUT TRENDS AFFECTING OMAN'S
MILITARY ORGANIZATION AND COMMAND AUTHORITY
SUMMARY. THE BRITISH-SECONDED COMMANDER OF OMAN'S
ARMED FORCES HAS EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION THAT HE HAS BECOME
LESS INFLUENTIAL WITH THE SULTAN NOW THAT FIGHTING IN DHOFAR
HAS STOPPED. HE HAS REITERATED CRITICISM OF POWER-WIELDERS
AROUND THE PALACE, AND CALLED HIS OWN AIR FORCE CHIEF A
CARPETBAGGER.

1. JUST OVER SEVEN MONTHS REMAIN OF SCHEDULED TOUR OF DUTY
OF MAJOR GENERAL KENNETH PERKINS, SAF COMMANDER SECONDED
FROM BRITISH ARMY. HIS DEPARTURE NEXT SPRING WILL COINCIDE
WITH OMAN'S CHANGEOVER TO SYSTEM OF THREE SEPERATE ARMED
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SERVICES, EACH REPORTING DIRECT TO SULTAN QABOOS AND WITH A

CENTRAL COORDINATING STAFF. AUTHOR OF THIS REORGANIZATION IS BELIEVED TO BE SULTAN'S EQUERRY, BRIG. TIM LANDON, BACKED BY OTHERS (SUCH AS SOAF COMMANDER ERIC BENNETT) WHO SEE IN IT GREATER POWR FOR THEMSELVES. AGAINST THIS BACK-GROUND WE REPORT FOLLOWING COMMENTS MADE PRIVATELY TO AMBASSADOR BY GEN. PERKINS AUGUST 26.

2. PERKINS SAID THERE HAS BEEN A SHAPR DECLINE IN HIS OWN INCLUENCE ON SULTAN PERSONALLY AND ON OTHERS WITH RULE IN OMAN'S SECURITY AFFAIRS NOW THAT DHOFAR WAR IS OVER. SO LONG AS THERE WAS FIGHTING, ADVICE OF SAF COMMAND WAS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL BY THE PALACE AND USUALLY WAS FOLLOWED. NOW THAT THE SOUTH IS PEACEFUL, THIS HAS CHANGED. THOUGH SULTAN STILL IS ACCESSIBLE TO CSAF, OTHERS IN THE COTERIE OF ADVISORS AROUND THE PALACE THROW THEIR WEIGHT AROUND ON MILITARY QUESTIONS TO MUCH GREATER EFFECT. THIS WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BE BAD. PERKINS WENT ON, WERE THERE SOME PERSON OR MECHANISM TO SIFT THROUGH AND RECONCILE ADVICE ON SECURITY MATTERS. BUT THERE IS NONE. HM'S DECISIONS ARE IN CREASINGLY A MATTER OF "WHO SAW HIM LAST" AND, SAID PERKINS, "IT USUALLY TURNS OUT TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE CARPETBAGGERS". HE NAMED EQUERRY LANDON, DR. OMAR ZAWAWI, POLICE INSPECTOR GENERAL D'SILVA, AND SOAF COMMANDER BENNETT.

3. GOING ON PERKINS CONTRASTED THE SITUATION HERE WITH THAT IN JORDAN AND IRAN. THERE, HE SAID, HUSSEIN AND THE SHAH BOTH CSIGN AND RULE. THEY ARE IN CHARGE, EVERYONE KNOWS IT, THEY ENUNCIATE THEIR DECISIONS ON SECURITY MATTERS AND MAKE THEM STICK. HERE IT IS NOT SO. QABONS IN EFFECT PERMITS HIMSELF TO BE RUN OVER, AND THERE IS NO MECHANISM FOR SORTING OUT CON-FLICTING RECOMMENDATIONS.

4. PERKINS THOUGHT THIS SITUATION AS TIME GOES ON WILL HAVE NOTICEABLE IMPACT ON EFFECTIVENESS AND MORALE OF SECONDED BRITISH OFFICERS IN OMAN'S ARMED FORCES. AS HE SEES IT, SAF COMMANDER IN PAST HAS HAD BOTH THE RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY NEEDED FOR RUNNING THE MILITARY EFFICIENTLY. NOW THIS AUTHORITY IS BEING CHALLENGED--THROUGH "THE CARPETBAGGERS" STILL WANT TO LEAVE SAF COMMAND RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING THEIR DECISIONS, COMMAND REORGANIZATION, HM PLACE AND OMANT OFFICER IN CHIEF OF STAFF SLOT. INSTEAD, DECISION IS TO HAVE AN OMANT DEPUTY

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COS--AND FORTUNATELY "THE RIGHT ONE, INDEED THE ONLY QUALIFIED ONE WAS CHOSEN" (LT. COL. SALIM AL-GHAZALI).

5. COMMENT: GEN. PERKINS HAS BEEN EXCELLENTOAN FOR SAF COMMAND AND WE BELIEVE STILL HAS THE SULTAN'S CONFIDENCE. WE THINK HIS EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION IS GENUINE (HE SAID HE HAS RECENTLY SHARED HIS THOUGHT WITH BRITISH AMBASSADOR AS WELL) AND IS HEAVILY BASED ON PHILOSOPHICAL REPUGNANCE AT PREVALING OMANI

SYSTEM THAT PERMITS THOSE CLOSE TO THE SULTAN SUCH POWER OF MANIPULATION IN SECURITY AS WELL AS OTHER MATTERS. PERKINS' ANTIPATHY TOWARD TIM LONDON HAS SURFACED WITH US BEFORE--HE VIEWS LONDON AS LITTLE MORE THAN A PARASITE ON THE OMAN BODY POLITIC. (FACT THAT INCOMING CHIEF OF STAFF, BRIG. PETER THWATTES, IS A LONDON NOMINEE PROBABLY UPSETS PERKINS FURTHER.) PERKINS' NAMING OF HIS OWN AIR FORCE SUBORDINATE, GROUP CAPTAIN BENNETT, AS CARPETBAGGER CONFIRMS OUR OBSERVATIONS THAT BENNETT HAS ACTIVELY SIDED WITH THOSE OUT TO REORGANIZE THE MILITARY SETUP.

6. WHILE PERKINS DID NOT GO INTO OTHER MATTERS ON WHICH HIS OWN ADVICE HAS BEEN TURNED ASIDE, THEY MAY INCLUDE THE CONTINUING NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE BAC AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM. WE DO NOT KNOW JUST HOW PERKINS VIEWS THIS ONE, THOUGH WE GUESS HIS TRIP TO LONDON NEXT WEEK IS TO JOIN IN LATEST GO-AROUND ON JAGUARS AND RAPIERS.

7. THIS WHOLE BUSINESS IS ANOTHER REMINDER OF OMAN'S NEED FOR A PRIME MINISTER. OR SOME ALTERNATE DEVICE IN THE CHAIN OF GOVERNMENTAL COMMAND JUST UNDER THE SULTAN TO RECONCILE CONTRADICTIONARY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS SYSTEMATICALLY. IT WOULD BE HEALTHY THING IF THERE WERE AT LEAST SOME APPEARANCE THAT THE MERITS OF DIVERGENT RECOMMENDATIONS WERE GIVEN AN OBJECTIVE HEARING IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. SULTAN HIMSELF DOES NOT APPEAR TO RECOGNIZE THIS, NOR TO BE ENERGETIC ENOUGH HIMSELF TO CON- VENE MEETINGS FOR THRESHING THING OUT. WOLF. UNQTE: ROBINSON

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